Freedom Watch™

Citizens Project

The Intimate Enemy

Finding Myself in the Religious Right

by Donna Minkowitz

Donna Minkowitz covered gay and lesbian politics and culture for the *Village Voice* for eight years. Her writing has also appeared in *The Nation, Ms.*, the *Utne Reader, New York* magazine and the *Advocate.* Minkowitz, who has won journalism awards from Radcliffe College, the National Women's Political Caucus and GLAAD, lives in Brooklyn, New York. She is currently working on a book about the gay movement and the religious right.

The following is a short excerpt from a talk Minkowitz gave in March as the annual speaker of the Colorado Springs Justice and Peace Commission.

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When I first started writing about the religious right six years ago, I thought I knew very clearly who they were: everything I was not. I was a gay activist and they were frightened of sexuality. I was a feminist, and they hated women. I was against authoritarianism, and they thought children should be belted and Third World governments should be kept in line. I was against retribution, and they believed in a God who was going to torture unbelievers in hell for all eternity simply because they didn't believe in him.

Every issue I was for, they were against. They didn't think the poor deserved welfare, but they did think the contras and the apartheid government in South Africa did. They saw innocent recreational sex as dangerous, but often tried to squash government efforts to prevent the most baneful form of sexuality, sexual abuse within the family. In so many ways, it was hard not to think of them as agents of the Devil. The religious right not only believed in everything that was *wrong*, they were so well-organized, so well-funded, so successful, that they appeared to be the insidious minions of some sort of satanic superman. I think I saw them as nearly omnipotent.

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I don't literally believe in the Devil, but I think I really did see the religious right that way – as the representatives of evil, evil's special people. In the same way that evangelical conservatives speak of Satan, I thought about the religious right: that any time they were resisted, thwarted, offended, hurt or shamed was a victory for the forces of good and a defeat for the Enemy who wants to hurt us all.

One of the reasons that I felt this way was that I am a member of a constituency that has been attacked and harmed pretty badly by the religious right: lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. I first started writing about them the year they began to sponsor ballot initiatives aimed at depriving gay people of protections from discrimination in housing and employment. Organizers across the country suggested that homosexuals were economic predators, secret Nazis, dangerous disease-spreaders who wanted straights to die, serial murderers, and sexual abusers of children.

Dressed up as a Christian right activist, I found myself becoming aware of parts of myself I never knew were there.

Being the object of hate literature was extremely frightening. I am sure that most of you will understand if I say that I felt personally and directly threatened by the religious right at that time. I still do – not just on gay issues, but on a whole host of other ones as well. But as I spent more time studying the religious right, my attitudes toward them changed in a way I never could have anticipated. Specifically, what's changed is the part of me that saw them as everything I am not.

Continued on page 2

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Ethical Issue of the Decade

A Note to Christian Church Friends

by James W. White, Senior Minister
First Congregational United Church of Christ
Colorado Springs

On November 19, 1993 the Bill Moyers' documentary on Colorado Springs, called "The New Holy Wars," was first shown on public television. Our church had a watch-the-program-evening before a big screen TV set.

That same weekend Conference Ministers (read: Bishops) of our denomination, The United Church of Christ, were meeting at Camp LaForet in the Black Forest. They were interested in seeing the program but could not get reception out there ... so they joined with members of our congregation for viewing. In the after-program discussion, I said, "I think that with media acceptance of gays and with medical studies done, the homosexual controversy will go away quickly."

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David Jamieson of the Northern California conference replied, saying, "I wish you were right, Jim, but I think homosexuality is the defining ethical issue for the 1990s."

David Jamieson was prophetic.

I was naive.

For the last four years our church has been caught up in the issue of inclusion-exclusion of gay and lesbian persons, generally, and of the in-the-sanctuary same-gender commitment ceremonies, specifically. On March 9, 1997, by a vote of 173-91, the congregation passed a "Statement of Participation" which welcomes persons of all ages, sexes, races, handicaps, and sexual orientation into full communion, including the rite of "holy unions" for same-gender couples.

You will believe me when I say this has not been easy. We have lost members and dollars, and the whole process has been clouded by secondary and tertiary issues. Is the Participation Statement doctrine? (No.) Is the pastor certifiable? (Probably.) Etc. Basically, though, the issue itself is behind us.

For most churches it is still in front of them.

I don't know if our experience can be instructive, but I do know we learned a lot about being faithful. What we came to realize is that just as race was the defining ethical issue for the '60s, as war was the defining issue for the '70s, women's rights in the '80s ... gay and lesbian concerns have moved front and center as the ethical issue of this decade. It will not go away.

All Christians are having to face what the Bible says about homosexuality – and, does it say anything? Some folk on The Way are dealing with questions of allowing access

Continued on page 2

The Intimate Enemy, Continued

I started going in disguise to religious right conferences and rallies because I wanted to experience my nemesis. I think it was almost an act of bravado, a desire to come up close to the people who hate me and survive time spent with them. It felt like going to the underworld. At the first Christian Coalition conference I went to, the Navy women who'd been sexually harassed at Tailhook were denounced as "sluts," and we all wildly applauded Beverly LaHaye when she said that "we *real* women want husbands – husbands of the *male* gender! I feel sorry for the radical women's movement, because they cannot experience that kind of love!"

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Later, in a grocery in a small town in Mississippi, a young man threatened me with rape just because I'd asked him journalistic questions about the lesbian feminist educational retreat down the road.

Meeting people like this and coming back alive and whole from the experience gave me a considerable sense of power. I could document and expose *these people, and no one but* me controlled how I represented them. That's probably what made it possible for me to take the next step in my work with the religious right – not just exposing *their* loathsomeness, but exposing myself to my readers as well. Dressed up as a Christian right activist, I found myself becoming aware of parts of myself [I'd never known] were there. Somehow, there were all these religious-right personas inside me.

The parts of myself that I met when I put on these clothes and mingled at religious right gatherings were very unsettling. When I went to my first Christian Coalition conference in '93, I confronted a person inside me who wanted to be dumb, airheaded, and feminine and submit to authority. Enthusiastically waving the American flag that was part of my place setting, I realized how easy it was for me to enjoy fascistic spectacle. I was at the "God and Country Banquet," and anthems of each of this country's military services were being sung as we saluted Ollie North, the evening's honoree. It was delicious, waving my flag and honoring a man who had fundraised for torturers. It was also suspiciously easy to get into character as the mindless waif I was posing as, the one that knew that man was her head, just as Christ was the head of the church. Did I want to be her? It felt deliciously forbidden.

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For they were very familiar. A lot of my own political activism and my writing and even just my daily activities in the world had been motivated by the same desire, which I had always interpreted as the desire to fight back. To me, Phelps didn't feel like an alien, but a brother – hurting his enemies any way he could. "I love to use words that send them off the edge emotionally," he'd told me. "there's nothing better than that." For a long time, I had also loved to offend people. It felt like I was grinding the oppressor's head into the dirt. Spending time with the Phelpses, I saw that in their own minds, that was exactly what they were doing, too.

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What I had in common with the religious right, it turned out, was not only a whole host of ugly but innocent feelings – like the urge to throw my enemies in a lake of fire, or the passionate longing to submit to and omnipotent and capricious Being, or the desire to run the entire country according to my beliefs – but also compassion, love, and the desire to protect and heal myself and other people. They were not evil's special people, it turned out, but my people. My relatives, not the Demon.

And if they weren't the Demon, it was finally much less easy to see myself that way. As Richard Hofstadter suggested, when we demonize, it's ourselves we are demonizing mainly. The hated enemy, Hofstadter writes, gives us "an opportunity to project and freely express unacceptable aspects of our own minds." Sometimes, it turns out, the only way to embrace the self if to embrace "evil's special people." **CP**

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Christ's presence, his just/loving presence, be with you, my friends. **CP**

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Citizens Project's 5th Anniversary!

Join us for our fifth anniversary celebration at the new *Primitivo* wine bar and restaurant

Tuesday, June 17
6pm - 8pm
Primitivo
28 S. Tejon St.
Hors d'oeuvres and wine served
$12 per person
RSVP by June 13 to 520-9899

Host Committee:
Peg Bacon
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Wayne and Mary Mashburn
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Special thanks to PRIMITIVO WINE BAR for underwriting this celebration.

The Spirit of Community

Gill Foundation Fosters Collaboration

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The Gill Foundation was established in 1994 by Tim Gill, the founder and chair of Quark, Inc., a Denver-based computer software company. The mission of the foundation is to support the needs of under-served and under-funded communities in their struggle for equality. The foundation focuses its funding on activities and organizations serving gay men and lesbians, people living with AIDS, and other minorities.

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Since its inception, the Gill Foundation has provided nearly $5 million in grants to organizations across the country and in Colorado. In doing so, the Gill Foundation has become an important force in the Colorado civil rights movement. Rooted in the philosophy that the most important thing a foundation can do is help people help themselves, Tim Gill, and his Colorado and Washington, DC-based professional staff of seven, work diligently to build alliances with the communities they serve. By developing close relationships with their core constituencies, they are able to respond effectively to the needs of the gay and lesbian community and others to develop funding strategies and special programs which strengthen various communities.

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"We are particularly interested in funding programs in non-urban areas of the country," said Katherine Pease, Executive Director of the Gill Foundation. "These non-urban-area organizations do not readily have access to traditional sources of funding and it is important in our grantmaking practices to take a leadership role in socially responsible philanthropy."

The Gill Foundation helps fund several projects in Colorado Springs, such as Ground Zero, Citizens Project, and the Colorado Springs Community Alliance. The Colorado Springs community recently has begun to benefit from another program of the Gill Foundation: the Gay and Lesbian OutGiving Fund. The Gay and Lesbian OutGiving Fund was established in 1996 to build awareness of the contributions gay men and lesbians make as part of American society. The Fund was inspired in part by The Cheshire Ball, a fundraising event sponsored by Colorado's gay and lesbian community to raise money for organizations dedicated to serving Colorado's children. The Ball has awarded over $159,000 to children's organizations since 1994 and anticipates raising over $70,000 for Colorado children's organizations at the 1997 Ball.

The most recent high profile event of the Gay and Lesbian OutGiving Fund was an historic occasion for Colorado Springs. On May 7th, Elie Wiesel, Nobel Laureate, Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient and Holocaust survivor, was welcomed to the community for a speech at Palmer High School. For weeks prior to this Holocaust Commemoration, numerous diverse groups, under the leadership of Food for Thought Gatherings, worked together to plan the event. Groups involved included Temple Shalom, New Life Church, Chinook Bookshop, Ground Zero, Citizens Project and the Gill Foundation's Gay and Lesbian OutGiving Fund, which provided a large financial contribution that made Wiesel's appearance possible.

The collaboration needed to make such an important event happen is precisely the purpose of the Gay and Lesbian OutGiving Fund. Said Pease, "Every day, gay men and lesbians support causes and organizations that affect everyone's quality of life. Because there has been no way of identifying this money as coming from the gay and lesbian community this philanthropy has been, in a sense, 'invisible'. The Gay and Lesbian OutGiving Fund is dedicated to bringing to light this previously invisible philanthropy of gay men and lesbians."

Other recent grants of the Gay and Lesbian OutGiving Fund include:

Kempe Children's Foundation "Drive Against Child Abuse Capital Campaign" – $25,000

KRCC Public Radio $17,500

Christmas in April which uses volunteers to repair homes of low income families – $2,000

Colorado's Ocean Journey, an interactive aquarium planned for the Denver area – $1 million

Added Pease, "We are always looking for collaborative opportunities in the Colorado Springs community. We invite your phone calls and inquiries about how we can work in partnership with diverse groups and coalitions." **CP**

The Gill Foundation, including the Gay and Lesbian OutGiving Fund, can be reached at: 8 S. Nevada, Suite 303, Colorado Springs, CO 80903, 719-473-4455, or by E-mail at GillFound@aol.com

News Briefs

Arvada Springs?

Westword recently reported on the takeover of Arvada's Republican party by the far right. Now derisively labeled "Arvada Springs" (after our own fair city) by old-line Republicans, the city has seen a dramatic swing to the right in Republican leadership. As Arvada Republican Al Meiklejohn explains, "These people have a view that churches ought to run the government. [They] want to impose their views on us by governmental force."

All three of Arvada's representatives (Barry Arrington, Mark Paschall and Jim Congrove) are from the far-right camp of the Republican Party. Arrington helped found Rocky Mountain Family Council, a state organization affiliated with Focus on the Family. During the election, some moderate Republicans even launched a campaign supporting the Democratic candidates running against these three Republicans.

Militia sympathizer, Pat Miller, is a driving force behind Arvada's recent takeover. She began her political involvement by challenging a book in her son's school and went on to unsuccessfully challenge Congressman David Skaggs' seat twice. True to Pat Robertson's style, Miller is now using the mailing list from her failed campaigns to bolster her new employer, Citizens for Responsible Government, an anti-abortion lobby known for blasting moderate Republicans. Says Miller, "I know how to run campaigns and I know how to network; I know grassroots work, I know how to raise money now, and I'm going to look for good candidates just like me."

CFV's Run-in with the Law

Colorado for Family Values is currently embroiled in a legal battle over their failure to disclose public information. The Colorado Court of Appeals upheld a ruling that CFV violated the Campaign Reform Act by failing to register as a political campaign and disclose campaign donors.

CFV launched a campaign to raise $1 million for an "Amendment 2 Legal Defense Fund" in May of 1993. The Fund was formed to oppose a Protection from Discrimination initiative which would have overturned Amendment 2. (The initiative failed to gather enough signatures by the filing deadline and the effort was abandoned).

CFV may appeal to the Colorado Supreme Court. However, if the court does not grant review, they will be forced to fulfill registration requirements and disclose the donors to their campaign.

Cleveland Voucher Plan Overturned

An Ohio appeals court struck down Cleveland's voucher program on May 1, ruling that it allowed governmental aid to religion. The Cleveland program, now nearing the end of its first year, was the first large-scale voucher program to provide public funds for private religious school tuition. The court was troubled by the fact that 80 percent of the schools which agreed to accept vouchers were parochial schools. It held that the voucher program limited parental choice to struggling city schools or sectarian schools.

Ralph Reed, Campaign Guru

Ralph Reed recently resigned as Executive Director of the Christian Coalition. He has announced his plans to start a new organization, Century Strategies, to manage campaigns "at every level of government." Century Strategies will focus on "building a 'farm team' of hundreds of state legislative, school board and local candidates across the country," Reed recently explained. Look for stealth tactics, coming soon to an election near you.

End of Session Brings End for Hate Crimes Bill

Although it progressed further than any previous similar legislation, a bill aimed at extending the existing Ethnic Intimidation Act was defeated before the end of the Colorado legislative session. The Hate Crimes bill would have punished as a hate crime any assault against a person because of age, sexual orientation, or physical or mental disability. The bill would have amended the Ethnic Intimidation Act, which addresses crimes motivated by race, color or ethnic origin. **CP**

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The Gill Foundation helps fund several projects in Colorado Springs, such as Ground Zero, Citizens Project, and the Colorado Springs Community Alliance. The Colorado Springs community recently has begun to benefit from another program of the Gill Foundation: the Gay and Lesbian OutGiving Fund. The Gay and Lesbian OutGiving Fund was established in 1996 to build awareness of the contributions gay men and lesbians make as part of American society. The Fund was inspired in part by The Cheshire Ball, a fundraising event sponsored by Colorado's gay and lesbian community to raise money for organizations dedicated to serving Colorado's children. The Ball has awarded over $159,000 to children's organizations since 1994 and anticipates raising over $70,000 for Colorado children's organizations at the 1997 Ball.

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The most recent high profile event of the Gay and Lesbian OutGiving Fund was an historic occasion for Colorado Springs. On May 7th, Elie Wiesel, Nobel Laureate, Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient and Holocaust survivor, was welcomed to the community for a speech at Palmer High School. For weeks prior to this Holocaust Commemoration, numerous diverse groups, under the leadership of Food for Thought Gatherings, worked together to plan the event. Groups involved included Temple Shalom, New Life Church, Chinook Bookshop, Ground Zero, Citizens Project and the Gill Foundation's Gay and Lesbian OutGiving Fund, which provided a large financial contribution that made Wiesel's appearance possible.

The collaboration needed to make such an important event happen is precisely the purpose of the Gay and Lesbian OutGiving Fund. Said Pease, "Every day, gay men and lesbians support causes and organizations that affect everyone's quality of life. Because there has been no way of identifying this money as coming from the gay and lesbian community this philanthropy has been, in a sense, 'invisible'. The Gay and Lesbian OutGiving Fund is dedicated to bringing to light this previously invisible philanthropy of gay men and lesbians."

Other recent grants of the Gay and Lesbian OutGiving Fund include:

Kempe Children's Foundation "Drive Against Child Abuse Capital Campaign" – $25,000

KRCC Public Radio $17,500

Christmas in April which uses volunteers to repair homes of low income families – $2,000

Colorado's Ocean Journey, an interactive aquarium planned for the Denver area – $1 million

Added Pease, "We are always looking for collaborative opportunities in the Colorado Springs community. We invite your phone calls and inquiries about how we can work in partnership with diverse groups and coalitions." **CP**

The Gill Foundation, including the Gay and Lesbian OutGiving Fund, can be reached at: 8 S. Nevada, Suite 303, Colorado Springs, CO 80903, 719-473-4455, or by E-mail at GillFound@aol.com

News Briefs

Arvada Springs?

Westword recently reported on the takeover of Arvada's Republican party by the far right. Now derisively labeled "Arvada Springs" (after our own fair city) by old-line Republicans, the city has seen a dramatic swing to the right in Republican leadership. As Arvada Republican Al Meiklejohn explains, "These people have a view that churches ought to run the government. [They] want to impose their views on us by governmental force."

All three of Arvada's representatives (Barry Arrington, Mark Paschall and Jim Congrove) are from the far-right camp of the Republican Party. Arrington helped found Rocky Mountain Family Council, a state organization affiliated with Focus on the Family. During the election, some moderate Republicans even launched a campaign supporting the Democratic candidates running against these three Republicans.

Militia sympathizer, Pat Miller, is a driving force behind Arvada's recent takeover. She began her political involvement by challenging a book in her son's school and went on to unsuccessfully challenge Congressman David Skaggs' seat twice. True to Pat Robertson's style, Miller is now using the mailing list from her failed campaigns to bolster her new employer, Citizens for Responsible Government, an anti-abortion lobby known for blasting moderate Republicans. Says Miller, "I know how to run campaigns and I know how to network; I know grassroots work, I know how to raise money now, and I'm going to look for good candidates just like me."

CFV's Run-In with the Law

Colorado for Family Values is currently embroiled in a legal battle over their failure to disclose public information. The Colorado Court of Appeals upheld a ruling that CFV violated the Campaign Reform Act by failing to register as a political campaign and disclose campaign donors.

CFV launched a campaign to raise $1 million for an "Amendment 2 Legal Defense Fund" in May of 1995. The Fund was formed to oppose a Protection from Discrimination initiative which would have overturned Amendment 2. (The initiative failed to gather enough signatures by the filing deadline and the effort was abandoned).

CFV may appeal to the Colorado Supreme Court. However, if the court does not grant review, they will be forced to fulfill registration requirements and disclose the donors to their campaign.

Cleveland Voucher Plan Overturned

An Ohio appeals court struck down Cleveland's voucher program on May 1, ruling that it allowed governmental aid to religion. The Cleveland program, now nearing the end of its first year, was the first large-scale voucher program to provide public funds for private religious school tuition. The court was troubled by the fact that 80 percent of the schools which agreed to accept vouchers were parochial schools. It held that the voucher program limited parental choice to struggling city schools or sectarian schools.

Ralph Reed, Campaign Guru

Ralph Reed recently resigned as Executive Director of the Christian Coalition. He has announced his plans to start a new organization, Century Strategies, to manage campaigns "at every level of government." Century Strategies will focus on "building a 'farm team' of hundreds of state legislative, school board and local candidates across the country," Reed recently explained. Look for stealth tactics, coming soon to an election near you.

End of Session Brings End for Hate Crimes Bill

Although it progressed further than any previous similar legislation, a bill aimed at extending the existing Ethnic Intimidation Act was defeated before the end of the Colorado legislative session. The Hate Crimes bill would have punished as a hate crime any assault against a person because of age, sexual orientation, or physical or mental disability. The bill would have amended the Ethnic Intimidation Act, which addresses crimes motivated by race, color or ethnic origin. **CP**

Citizens Project

District 11 Votes on Sexual Conduct Policy

In the final chapter of the controversy stirred by the Palmer *Lever* articles on gay teens, the District 11 School Board has drafted a Health Education Policy and submitted it for review.

After addressing the content of the *Lever* article by revising the student publications policy, the board faced a campaign, launched by Colorado for Family Values, to adopt a Sexual Conduct Policy. CFV pushed for a policy that would, among other things, require the district to affirm traditional marriage.

The Board's Health Education Policy draft fell short of CFV's expectations however, as it fails to mandate the promotion of "traditional marriage", the most controversial component of Will Perkins' proposed policy.

The district's four page draft policy emphasizes responsibility, a healthy lifestyle and avoiding high risk behavior. The policy recognizes the role and responsibility of parents as the primary influence on their children and codifies their right to excuse their children from curriculum that contradicts their beliefs or teachings.

Board Policy Subcommittee members Lyman Kaiser and Bruce Doyle developed the draft, keeping in mind the majority of students in the district do not come from "traditional families" as CFV defines them. Basically, their new policy strengthens and clarifies current policy and practice.

The proposed policy was discussed at the May 21 School Board meeting. The Board expects to vote on the policy on Wednesday, June 4. That meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m.

We would be glad to provide you with a copy of the proposed policy. Just give us a call: 520-9899.

Inside Citizens Project

Cut It Out!

You and your scissors can improve Citizens Project's monitoring efforts. Citizens Project maintains an extensive research library with over 500 files on issues and organizations. If you come across examples or coverage of extremism in publications or on the internet, send it our way. Information in our library is used by the media and students and for *Freedom Watch* research. Our motto: when in doubt, cut it out! Our volunteer librarians will decide what we can use. (Don't worry about local papers and the state-wide dailies, we have them covered.) See below for mailing and fax information.

CP in the News

Citizens Project broke the story on the American Family Association's efforts to ban Howard Stern's book from the Pikes Peak Library District. While it was painful to drum up publicity for the AFA and (to a greater extent) Howard Stern, attacks on our libraries should be public knowledge. CP was quoted about this issue in the *Independent* and provided information to the *Gazette* and the *Denver Post.* Megan Day was a guest on P.M. Wynn's new talk show on 1460AM and appeared on local TV stations addressing the District 11 School Board. CP Board member Richard Van Scotter's opinion piece in the *Gazette* elicited many letters to the editor. The *Cheyenne Edition* used us as a resource for a story on core knowledge curriculum. **CP**

Announcements

Juneteenth

NAACP will host the 9th annual Juneteenth Celebration to commemorate Texas' Emancipation Day on June 14 and 15. Juneteenth marks the date slaves in Texas learned they were free due to the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation 18 months earlier. As Texans migrated to other states, Juneteenth celebrations migrated to many cities, including Arkansas, Oklahoma, California and Colorado. This year's festivities, with the theme "A New Day Begun; A Community Together," will take place at Memorial Park on the corner of Hancock and Pikes Peak.

You can make a difference

JOIN Citizens Project

Your voice for tolerance in the Pikes Peak region.

Citizens Project ...

- Reports on news and views in *Freedom Watch*
- Organizes campaigns, workshops and events
- Sponsors Candidate Surveys and Forums
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Our Mission: Citizens Project is a grassroots organization in the Pikes Peak region dedicated to upholding the traditional American values of pluralism, freedom of religion and separation of church and state.

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